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SELECTED POEMS.

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THE COTTER'S
SATURDAY NIGHT.

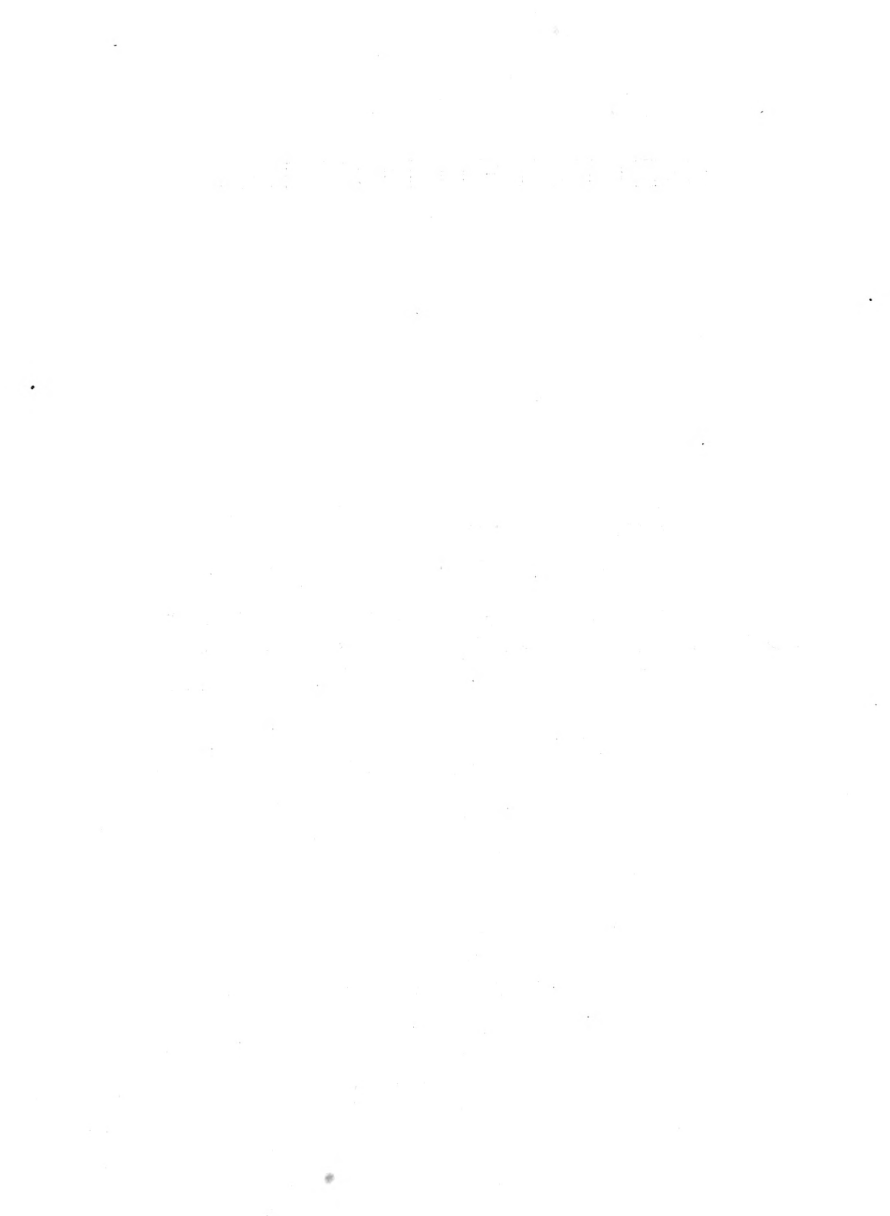
—Robert Burns

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Bunna

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THE grand power of poetry is its interpretative power ; by which I mean, not a power of drawing out in black and white an explanation of the mystery of the universe, but the power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them, and of our relations with them. When this sense is awakened in us, as to objects without us, we feel ourselves to be in contact with the essential nature of those objects, to be no longer bewildered and oppressed by them, but to have their secret, and to be in harmony with them ; and this feeling calms and satisfies us as no other can. Poetry, indeed, interprets in another way besides this ; but one of its two ways of interpreting, of exercising its highest power, is by awakening this sense in us. I will not now inquire whether this sense is illusive, whether it can be proved not to be illusive, whether it does absolutely make us possess the real nature of things ; all I say is, that poetry can awaken it in us, and that to awaken it is one of the highest powers of poetry. The interpretations of science do not give us this intimate sense of objects as the interpretations of poetry give it ; they appeal to a limited fac-

The Power of Poetry.

ulty, and not to the whole man. It is not Linnæus, or Cavendish, or Cuvier who gives us the true sense of animals, or water, or plants, who seizes their secret for us, who makes us participate in their life ; it is Shakespeare, with his

“ Daffodils
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty ; ”

it is Wordsworth, with his

“ voice . . . heard
In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides ; ”

it is Keats, with his

“ moving waters at their priest-like task
Of cold ablution round Earth's human shores. ”

—MATTHEW ARNOLD.

THE COTTER'S SATURDAY NIGHT.

INSCRIBED TO R. AIKEN, ESQ.

“ Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys and destiny obscure ;
Nor grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile,
The short but simple annals of the poor.”—GRAY.

My loved, my honored, much-respected friend,
No mercenary bard his homage pays :
With honest pride I scorn each selfish end ;
My dearest meed, a friend's esteem and praise.
To you I sing, in simple Scottish lays,
The lowly train in life's sequestered scene ;
The native feelings strong, the guileless ways ;
What Aiken in a cottage would have been ;
Ah ! though his worth unknown, far happier there, I ween.

November chill blows loud wi' angry sigh ;
The shortening winter-day is near a close ;
The miry beasts retreating frae the pleugh,
The blackening trains o' craws to their repose ;
The toilworn cotter frae his labor goes,
This night his weekly toil is at an end,—
Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,—
Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward bend.

The Cotter's Saturday Night.

At length his lonely cot appears in view,
Beneath the shelter of an aged tree ;
Th' expectant wee things, toddlin', stacher through
To meet their dad, wi' flichterin' noise an' glee.
His wee bit ingle, blinking bonnily,
His clean hearthstane, his thriftie wifie's smile,
The lispin infant prattling on his knee,
Does a' his weary carking cares beguile,
And makes him quite forget his labor and his toil.

Belyve the elder bairns come drapping in,
At service out amang the farmers roun' ;
Some ca' the pleugh, some herd, some tentie rin
A cannie errand to a neibor town ;
Their eldest hope, their Jenny, woman grown,
In youthfu' bloom, love sparkling in her e'e,
Comes hame, perhaps, to shew a bra' new gown,
Or deposit her sair-won penny-fee,
To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be.

Wi' joy unfeigned brothers and sisters meet,
An' each for other's weelfare kindly spiers :
The social hours, swift-winged, unnoticed fleet ;
Each tells the uncos that he sees or hears ;
The parents, partial, eye their hopeful years ;
Anticipation forward points the view.
The mother, wi' her needle an' her shears,
Gars auld claes look amaist as weel's the new ;
The father mixes a' wi' admonition due.





The Cotter's Saturday Night.

Their master's an' their mistress's command,
The youngers a' are warnéd to obey ;
And mind their labors wi' an eydent hand,
And ne'er, though out o' sight, to jauk or play ;
“ An' O, be sure to fear the Lord alway !
An' mind your duty, duly, morn an' night !
Lest in temptation's path ye gang astray,
Implore his counsel and assisting might ;
They never sought in vain that sought the Lord aright ! ”

But, hark ! a rap comes gently to the door.
Jenny, wha kens the meaning o' the same,
Tells how a neibor lad cam o'er the moor,
To do some errands and convoy her hame.
The wily mother sees the conscious flame
Sparkle in Jenny's e'e, and flush her cheek ;
Wi' heart-struck anxious care inquires his name,
While Jenny hafflins is afraid to speak ;
Weel pleased the mother hears it's nae wild, worthless rake.

Wi' kindly welcome, Jenny brings him ben ;
A strappin' youth ; he tak's the mother's e'e ;
Blithe Jenny sees the visit's no ill ta'en ;
The father cracks of horses, pleughs, and kye.
The youngster's artless heart o'erflows wi' joy,
But blate and lathefu', scarce can weel behave ;
The mother, wi' a woman's wiles, can spy
What makes the youth sae bashfu' an' sae grave ;
Weel pleased to think her bairn's respected like the lave.

The Cotter's Saturday Night.

O happy love ! where love like this is found !
O heartfelt raptures ! bliss beyond compare !
I've paced much this weary mortal round,
And sage experience bids me this declare : —
If Heaven a draught of heavenly pleasure spare,
One cordial in this melancholy vale,
'T is when a youthful, loving, modest pair
In other's arms breathe out the tender tale,
Beneath the milk-white thorn that scents the evening gale.

Is there, in human form, that bears a heart,
A wretch, a villain, lost to love and truth,
That can, with studied, sly, ensnaring art,
Betray sweet Jenny's unsuspecting youth ?
Curse on his perjured arts ! dissembling smooth !
Are honor, virtue, conscience, all exiled ?
Is there no pity, no relenting ruth,
Points to the parents fondling o'er their child,
Then paints the ruined maid, and their distraction wild ?

But now the supper crowns their simple board,
The halesome parritch, chief o' Scotia's food ;
The soupe their only hawkie does afford,
That 'yont the hallan snugly chows her cood ;
The dame brings forth, in complimental mood,
To grace the lad, her weel-hained kebbuck fell,
An' aft he's prest, an' aft he ca's it guid ;
The frugal wife, garrulous, will tell,
How 't was a towmond auld, sin' lint was i' the bell.

The Cotter's Saturday Night.

The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
They, round the ingle, form a circle wide ;
The sire turns o'er, wi' patriarchal grace,
The big ha'-Bible, ance his father's pride ;
His bonnet reverently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets wearing thin an' bare :
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales a portion with judicious care ;
And " Let us worship God !" he says with solemn air.

They chant their artless notes in simple guise ;
They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim :
Perhaps " Dundee's " wild-warbling measures rise,
Or plaintive " Martyrs," worthy of the name ;
Or noble " Elgin " beets the heavenward flame,
The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays :
Compared with these, Italian trills are tame ;
The tickled ears no heartfelt raptures raise ;
Nae unison hae they with our Creator's praise.

The priest-like father reads the sacred page,—
How Abram was the friend of God on high ;
Or Moses bade eternal warfare wage
With Amalek's ungracious progeny,
Or how the royal bard did groaning lie
Beneath the stroke of Heaven's avenging ire ;
Or Job's pathetic plaint, and wailing cry ;
Or rapt Isaiah's wild, seraphic fire ;
Or other holy seers that tune the sacred lyre.

The Cotter's Saturday Night.

Perhaps the Christian volume is the theme, —
How guiltless blood for guilty man was shed ;
How He, who bore in Heaven the second name,
Had not on earth whereon to lay his head :
How his first followers and servants sped ;
The precepts sage they wrote to many a land ;
How he, who lone in Patmos banishéd,
Saw in the sun a mighty angel stand,
And heard great Bab'lon's doom pronounced by Heaven's
command.

Then, kneeling down, to Heaven's eternal King,
The saint, the father, and the husband prays :
Hope "springs exulting on triumphant wing,"
That thus they all shall meet in future days ;
There ever bask in uncreated rays,
No more to sigh, or shed the bitter tear,
Together hymning their Creator's praise,
In such society, yet still more dear ;
While circling Time moves round in an eternal sphere.

Compared with this, how poor Religion's pride,
In all the pomp of method and of art,
When men display to congregations wide,
Devotion's every grace, except the heart !
The Power, incensed, the pageant will desert,
The pompous strain, the sacerdotal stole ;
But, haply, in some cottage far apart,
May hear, well pleased, the language of the soul ;
And in His Book of Life the inmates poor enroll.

The Cotter's Saturday Night.

Then homeward all take off their several way ;
The youngling cottagers retire to rest :
The parent-pair their secret homage pay,
And proffer up to Heaven the warm request,
That He who stills the raven's clamorous nest,
And decks the lily fair in flowery pride,
Would, in the way His wisdom sees the best,
For them and for their little ones provide ;
But, chiefly, in their hearts with grace divine preside.

From scenes like these old Scotia's grandeur springs,
That makes her loved at home, revered abroad ;
Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
“ An honest man 's the noblest work of God ! ”
And certes, in fair Virtue's heavenly road,
The cottage leaves the palace far behind :
What is a lordling's pomp ?—a cumbrous load,
Disguising oft the wretch of human kind,
Studied in arts of hell, in wickedness refined !

O Scotia ! my dear, my native soil !
For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent,
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content !
And, O, may Heaven their simple lives prevent
From luxury's contagion, weak and vile !
Then, how'er crowns and coronets be rent,
A virtuous populace may rise the while,
And stand a wall of fire around their much-loved isle.

The Cotter's Saturday Night.

O Thou ! who poured the patriotic tide,
That streamed through Wallace's undaunted heart ;
Who dared to nobly stem tyrannic pride,
Or nobly die, the second glorious part,
(The patriot's God peculiarly Thou art,
His friend, inspirer, guardian, and reward !)
O, never, never Scotia's realm desert ;
But still the patriot and the patriot bard
In bright succession raise, her ornament and guard !

—ROBERT BURNS.

THE BANKS O' DOON.

YE banks and braes o' bonnie Doon

How can ye bloom sae fair !

How can ye chant, ye little birds,

And I sae fu' o' care !

Thou 'll break my heart, thou bonnie bird

That sings upon the bough ;

Thou minds me o' the happy days

When my fause Luvè was true.

Thou 'll break my heart, thou bonnie bird

That sings beside thy mate ;

For sae I sat, and sae I sang,

And wist na o' my fate.

Aft hae I roved by bonnie Doon

To see the woodbine twine,

And ilka bird sang o' its love ;

And sae did I o' mine.

Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose,

Frae aff its thorny tree ;

And my fause luvè staw the rose,

But left the thorn wi' me.

—ROBERT BURNS.

BONNIE LESLEY.

O saw ye bonnie Lesley,
As she gaed o'er the border?
She's gane, like Alexander,
To spread her conquests farther.

To see her is to love her,
And love but her for ever ;
For Nature made her what she is,
And ne'er made sic anither !

Thou art a queen, fair Lesley,
Thy subjects we, before thee :
Thou art divine, fair Lesley,
The hearts o' men adore thee.

The deil he could na scaith thee,
Or aught that wad belang thee ;
He'd look into thy bonnie face,
And say, ' I canna wrang thee !'

The Powers aboon will tent thee ;
Misfortune sha' na steer thee ;
Thou'rt like themselves sae lovely
That ill they'll ne'er let near thee.

Return again, fair Lesley,
Return to Caledonie !
That we may brag we hae a lass
There's nane again sae bonnie.

—ROBERT BURNS.

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